



Dear Friend,

This Sunday, June 28, is a day that most people in Annapolis and across Maryland will not forget. It was on this day two years ago that five innocent lives – Gerald Fischman, Rob Hiaasen, John McNamara, Rebecca Smith, and Wendi Winters – were torn from their families in one of the worst mass shootings of media in our nation’s history.

My heartfelt condolences and prayers continue to go out to the families of these five wonderful people. The surviving staff members also deserve our continued prayers and praise for their resilience and dedication to their mission as journalists.

This horrific incident was an attack on innocent people and a deliberate attack on the freedom of the press in our country.

Famed news anchor Walter Cronkite once said: “Freedom of the press is not just important to democracy; it is democracy.”

Our Constitution – which established the rule of law in the United States of America – grants us certain rights and responsibilities. Freedom of the press, central to the very First Amendment to the Constitution, has often been under attack, figuratively speaking, since our Nation’s founding.

Today, those attacks have become more frequent – and they are not just figurative anymore; they are physical. These attacks are spurred on by dangerous rhetoric that has created an “open season” on denigrating and harassing the media for doing its job – asking questions that need to be asked, investigating the stories that need to be investigated, and bringing needed transparency to the halls of power whether they are in Annapolis; Washington, D.C.; or elsewhere around the country.

In 2018, after the shooting at the *Capital Gazette*, the United States was, for the first time, added to the list of “the most deadly countries for journalists,” in an annual report by the group, Reporters Without Borders.

Physical attacks on media have grown so troublesome that the Committee to Protect Journalists, an independent nonprofit that promotes press freedoms globally, actually started a “U.S. Freedom Tracker” to show the scope of the problem. In 2020, so far, there have been 107 journalists attacked, 36 arrested – including some, like CNN, live on TV. These astounding numbers are for the U.S. only.

All around the globe, reporters face harassment and persecution for their attempts to spread the truth and hold leaders accountable. Each year, hundreds of journalists are attacked, imprisoned, and tortured. The majority of the journalists killed are murdered in direct relation to their work as journalists.

A quote often attributed to President Abraham Lincoln that speaks to this moment: “I am a firm believer in the people. If given the truth, they can be depended upon to meet any national crisis. The great point is to bring them the real facts.” As a nation, we must commit to seeking out the truth. We cannot attack the free press; we must honor it.

To that end, I introduced a bill, S. 1969, to establish a Fallen Journalist Memorial in our Nation’s Capital. This legislation, which would use zero taxpayer funds, authorizes a commemorative work on eligible federal land in commemoration of the sacrifices made by journalists for an independent and free media.

While a memorial is being planned in Annapolis, this national memorial would serve as a fitting tribute to the Capital Gazette’s staff and to all other journalists who have died in the line of duty, and to our Nation’s commitment to a free press.

In the wake of George Floyd’s death, our Nation is having a difficult but long-overdue and necessary discussion about police reform, about systemic racism, and about some of the portraits, busts, statues, and memorials in the U.S. Capitol and around the country that should be removed.

My hope is that we can all agree that building a new national memorial to honor Gerald Fischman, Rob Hiaasen, John McNamara, Rebecca Smith, Wendi Winters, and all journalists and media workers who have died in the line of duty, who have died protecting a free press, is a worthy endeavor.

Wishing you peace,


Ben